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*Ithāf al-dhakī* by Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī: A Commentary of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* for *Jāwī* Audiences

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## Résumé

*Itḥāf al-dhakī* par Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī : un commentaire du *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* pour des publics Jāwī  
Cet article est une introduction à la pensée d'Ibrāhīm ibn Ḥasan al-Kūrānī relative aux concepts mystiques et théologiques islamiques discutés dans l'un de ses traités soufis, le *Itḥāf al-dhakī*, en fait l'une des rares sources arabes adressées à la communauté musulmane Jāwī d'Insulinde au cours du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle. En tant que tel, ce texte est un élément important pour l'histoire socio-intellectuelle de la région. Il concerne les enseignements des sept niveaux (*Martabat Tujuh*), très populaires en Insulinde à l'époque. Le *Itḥāf al-dhakī*, probablement

## Abstract

This article is an introduction of Ibrāhīm ibn Ḥasan al-Kūrānī's thought of Islamic theological and mystical concepts discussed in one of his Sufi treatises, the *Itḥāf al-dhakī*, in fact one of only few Arabic sources addressed to the Jāwī Muslim community in Nusantara during the seventeenth century. As such, this text is an important part of the social-intellectual history of the region. It is related to the teachings of the Seven Grades (*Martabat Tujuh*), which were very popular in Nusantara at the time. The *Itḥāf al-dhakī*, probably written a few years before 1665, became the answer to divine questions or, more specifically, to questions about the *waḥdat al-wujūd* doctrine, that captivated the attention of readers in various areas of the Muslim World. After an evocation of the author's life, this article discusses his interpretation of Sufism, especially in relation to this doctrine. In fact, al-Kūrānī may clearly be considered as an interpreter and advocate of Ibn al-ʿArabī's philosophical Sufi thought.

OMAN FATHURAHMAN

*Ithāf al-dhakī* by Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī:  
A Commentary of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* for Jāwī Audiences

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**Introduction**

This article is an introduction to Ibrāhīm ibn Ḥasan al-Kūrānī's thought on Islamic theological and mystical concepts discussed in one of his Sufi treatises entitled *Ithāf al-dhakī bi-sharḥ al-tuḥfah al-mursalāh ilā al-nabī ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa-sallama* (The bestowal dedicated to one of discriminating intelligence in explanation of the gift addressed to the spirit of the Prophet).<sup>1</sup> The text is one of only few Arabic sources addressed to the Jāwī Muslim community in the seventeenth century, written by Ibrāhīm ibn Ḥasan al-Kūrānī al-Shahrazūrī al-Shahrānī al-Kurdī al-Madanī al-Shāfi'ī (1616-1690 CE), to whom I will further refer as al-Kūrānī.

I began philological research on the *Ithāf al-dhakī* in August 2006, thanks to a fellowship award from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation to do research at the Malaiologie Institute, Orientalisches Seminar der Universität zu Köln, Germany, until April 2008. Such research was kindly hosted and

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\* I would like to thank Henri Chambert-Loir for his comments on the very early draft of this article, and to the editors of the Journal *Archipel* for significant advices before publication. A special thank goes as well to Dick van der Meij, who wrote the English version of the draft.

1. A discussion with A.H. Johns highlighted the fact that some manuscripts of the *Ithāf al-dhakī* consulted bear in their title the word as *al-zakī* (pure), not *al-dhakī* (intelligent). However, since the author himself mentions that the addressed reader is *al-dhakī al-munṣif*, it is likely that the intended word is *al-dhakī*. Then, one would need to be very intelligent (*dhakī*) to follow closely the argument in the text. Philologically speaking, it is easy for a copyist to mistake 'zay' for 'dhal', and vice versa.

supervised by Edwin Wieringa, a Professor of Indonesian Philology and Islamic Studies at the Institute, whose help and advice highly contributed to the success of doing the research. Seventeen manuscripts of the *Ithāf al-dhakī*, which are preserved in different libraries around the globe, have been consulted to prepare a scholarly edition, while the total number of the manuscripts identified so far is thirty. The edition will be published separately, consisting of an introduction, an annotated text, a translation, and a commentary of the text.<sup>2</sup>

This article is therefore part of my ongoing research on the text, data and analysis of which have been improved thanks to the Chevening Fellowship for conducting research at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies during the Michaelmas Terms (27 September-10 December 2010). The extensive references on Islamic studies at the Centre and at the Bodleian library, as well as the opportunity to meet and discuss with other scholars, have greatly helped me to enrich this article.<sup>3</sup>

### Islam in Southeast Asia

The increased political and trade relations between Nusantara and the Arabic Islamic world since the 15<sup>th</sup> century made the first an important part of the Islamic tradition as a whole. Several theories regarding the coming of Islam in the Nusantara World have been suggested by scholars in the field,<sup>4</sup> and I do not pretend to overview this aspect here. Regardless of the different arguments about its early propagation in the Nusantara World, Islam spread and rooted in the Malay Muslim community, thanks to the global and international networking developed, both through trading activities and other mediums, including politics, religion, or marriage.

From the late sixteenth century, such networking continued to flourish due to the developing of Islamic sultanates in the region. A vigorous involvement of the local rulers in the international trade activities not only brought them into contact with Arab merchants but also with authorities in the Middle East.<sup>5</sup> This in turn encouraged a tremendous exodus of Malay

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2. I am keenly aware of my indebtedness to A.H. Johns who gave to me his research materials for a planned critical edition of the *Ithāf al-dhakī* he didn't have the opportunity to complete. His preliminary research has helped me to figure out the understanding of the text. My sincere gratitude is for Annabel Teh Gallop who kindly helped me to examine some materials from the British Library collections.

3. My sincere thanks goes to Francis Robinson who was kind enough to read the draft version of this article and gave some valuable comments and advice to explore some parts of the discussion, and to Michael Feener who reviewed it and suggested some revisions.

4. See for instance Drewes 1968, Johns 1975, Ricklefs 1979, Osman 1980, Azra 1994 and 2004.

5. Azra 2004: 9. Bruinessen (1990: 42) mentioned that in the 1630's, the rulers of Banten and Mataram competed each other to gain the title 'sultan' from the Sharif Mecca, which was

Muslims to perform pilgrimage, and eventually a religious journey to follow Islamic teachings by some prominent scholars in Mecca and Medina (Ḥaramayn). With the growing number of pilgrims, the Ḥaramayn became the hub of dynamic networks as the basis of a global Muslim intellectual community.<sup>6</sup>

Later, especially from the seventeenth century when the Islamic world was going through a political downfall, the Islamic intellectual tradition in contrast flourished with the Ḥaramayn as the center of scientific activities. At that time, the Ḥaramayn had become the melting pot where the various Islamic traditions from all over the world, including the Nusantara World, met and melted into a highly cosmopolitan intellectual network. Some Arabic sources referred to the Malay-Nusantara<sup>7</sup> ulamas as *jamā'at al-jāwīyīn*, or “the companions from ‘Jāwā’”.<sup>8</sup>

As suggested by Peter Riddell, Islam in the Nusantara World was derivative of the Middle East countries on the one hand, but on the other hand, some ‘Jāwī’ scholars such as Hamzah Fanṣūrī,<sup>9</sup> Shams al-Dīn al-Sumatra’ī,<sup>10</sup> Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī (d. 1658 CE), ‘Abd al-Ra’uf ibn ‘Alī al-Jāwī al-Fanṣūrī (1615-1693 CE),<sup>11</sup> Muḥammad Yūsuf al-Makassārī (1629-1699 CE), ‘Abd al-Ṣamad al-Palimbānī,<sup>12</sup> Arshad al-Banjarī (1710-1812

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regarded as a formal recognition of their sultanates. Moreover, the sultans believed that such title would add a supernatural endorsement to their power.

6. Levtzion 1997: 147.

7. The Nusantara World refers to the Archipelago area as a whole, including the Malay Peninsula.

8. One of the oldest Arabic sources found so far which mentions *jamā'at al-jāwīyīn* is *Ithāf al-dhakī* by Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī which I am dealing with, probably written in 1665 (Fathurahman 2009: 47-58). A specific discussion regarding the adjectival patronymic form (*nisbah*) ‘al-Jāwī’ has been carried out by R. Michael Feener & Michael Laffan (2005: 185-208). Based on their observation on *Tabaqāt al-khawwāṣ* by Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Sharjī (1410/1487), and *Mir'āt al-jinān* by ‘Abd Allāh ibn As’ad al-Yāfī’ī (1298-1367), the *nisbah* ‘al-Jāwī’ was already used in the thirteenth century.

9. A recent epigraphy-based argument regarding the date of his death has been proposed by C. Guillot & L. Kalus, who stated that he died in 1527 (2000: 3-24). Vladimir I. Braginsky (2001: 20-33), however, disputed this claim, but his criticism was countered furthermore in the same publication by Guillot & Kalus (2001: 34-38); see also Azra 2004: 171; Feener and Laffan also support this revised dating for Hamzah Fanṣūrī’s death, as it fits with their suggestions about the early Aden-Jāwī linkage in the fifteenth century (Feener and Laffan 2005: 205).

10. On the mystical thought of al-Samatra’ī, see Johns 2009: 148-163.

11. Some sources, including Azra 1994, add ‘al-Sinkili’ at the end of his name. However, his full name is ‘Abd al-Ra’uf ibn ‘Alī al-Jāwī al-Fanṣūrī, as mentioned in one of his canonical works, *Tarjūmān al-mustafīd* (Fathurahman & Holil 2007: 32-33). A scholarly edition of his only Arabic work, *Tanbīh al-māshī al-mansūb ilā ṭarīq al-Qushāshī*, has been published by Fathurahman (1999).

12. The precise time of his life and his career are still obscure. See Azra 2004: 113.

CE), Dāwūd al-Fatānī (d. 1847 CE), Nawawī al-Bantānī (1813-1879 CE) and others successfully demonstrated their ability as prolific and distinguished scholars originating from the region. As scholars, their names were connected to those of a number of ulamas in the Ḥaramayn who had been their teachers.<sup>13</sup> Some of them, like ‘Abd al-Ṣamad al-Palimbānī, even enjoyed their popularity as teachers for Arab, as well as Jāwī students in Arabia.

Their works on various Islamic subjects were recognized not only by their local Muslim communities, but also by wider audiences in the Muslim world.<sup>14</sup> As mentioned by Hooker, they were also formidable in translating heterogeneous Islamic thoughts from the original in Arabic language into the local languages and contexts, in order to provide teaching materials for those who, for some reasons, were not able to access the original sources.<sup>15</sup>

One of the Islamic traditions that settled in the Ḥaramayn and bore significant influence on the formation of the Islamic intellectual tradition in the Nusantara World was that from India. As will be seen below, one of the Sufi works that triggered debates in the Nusantara World was the *al-Tuḥfah al-mursalah ilā al-nabī ṣallallāhu ‘alayhi wa-sallama* (the Gift addressed to the spirit of the Prophet), further to be referred to as the *al-Tuḥfah al-mursalah*, written by the Indian Sufi named Faḍl Allāh al-Hindī al-Burhānpūrī (d. 1619 CE). It became widely known to Nusantara Muslims, especially through the ulamas network that was set up among the members of the Ḥaramayn community.<sup>16</sup>

It was also thanks to this network established between ulamas with various backgrounds that intercultural contacts and communication started to develop. It was not rare that a Ḥaramayn scholar (*‘ālim*), who had never visited a specific area, knew, although only in general terms, about social and religious events which occurred in other parts of the Muslim World, including the Nusantara World, thanks to the information he received from his colleagues or students from these areas.

Sometimes, relations between Malay-Nusantara scholars and their Ḥaramayn teachers were apparently very close and strong as recorded in the written sources we still have at our disposal. A number of Malay-Nusantara ulamas did not hesitate to speak of, or to report on developments regarding the religious social life in the Jāwī lands and to request fatwa on many religious issues that had become a problem.

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13. For an extensive discussion on the localisations of Islam in Nusantara as well as the engaged involvement of local Muslims in the region within a global, cosmopolitan community of Islamic religious scholarship, see Feener 2010: 471-503.

14. Riddell 2001: 8-9.

15. Hooker 1983: 1-22.

16. Azra 2004: 136.

The following is an example from the Sultanate of Banten. Sultan Pangeran Ratu or Sultan Abu al-Mafakhir (Abū al-Mafākhīr ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jāwī al-Shāfi‘ī, r. 1626-1651 CE) dispatched a special delegation to Mecca in 1638, carrying a number of inquiries about al-Ghazālī’s *Naṣīḥat al-mulūk*. The questions were put to Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī ibn ‘Allān al-Ṣiddīqī (1588-1647 CE), another famous scholar in the Ḥaramayn Islamic intellectual tradition. To answer the sultan’s questions, ibn ‘Allān wrote a book entitled *al-Mawāhib al-rabbāniyyah ‘an al-as’ilah al-Jāwīyah* (Various divine gifts in connection with the questions from the Jāwī Lands).<sup>17</sup>

Another example is the case of ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf ibn ‘Alī al-Jāwī al-Fanṣūrī who once asked his teacher in Medina, Ibrāhīm ibn Ḥasan al-Kūrānī, a question about the Unity of Being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) and the Seven Grades<sup>18</sup> doctrines discussed in *al-Tuḥfah al-mursalāh*, a Sufi treatise written in 1590 by an Indian scholar named Faḍl Allāh al-Hindī al-Burhānpūrī. He asked al-Kūrānī to write a clarification about these doctrines, because it had caused misunderstanding among the Nusantara Muslim community, especially in Aceh. As suggested by many sources, Aceh at that time held a strategic position as ‘the gate to the Holy Land’ (*Serambi Mekkah*),<sup>19</sup> and maintained strong political and socio-religious relations with the Middle East. Therefore ulamas living there at the time were in good contact with their teachers in the Ḥaramayn.

In answer to this request, al-Kūrānī wrote a text entitled *Itḥāf al-dhakī bi-sharḥ al-tuḥfah al-mursalāh ilā al-nabī ṣallallāhu ‘alayhi wa-sallama* (Tribute to a pure soul: an elucidation of the book that was bestowed upon the Prophet). We also know that al-Kūrānī wrote a pamphlet entitled *al-Jawābāt al-gharwīyah ‘an al-masā’il al-Jāwīyah al-jahrīyah* (Proper and clear answers to the questions from the Jāwī Lands).<sup>20</sup>

In the following century, Arshad al-Banjārī also asked for a fatwa from his teacher, Sulaymān al-Kurdī (1715-1780 CE), regarding the policy of the Sultanate of Banjar to prioritize taxes over *zakat*.<sup>21</sup> Sulaymān al-Kurdī also wrote a book entitled *al-Durrah al-bahīyah fī jawāb al-as’ilah al-Jāwīyah* (Valuable pearl to answer the questions from the Jāwī Lands).

17. Voorhoeve 1980: 204-205; for a discussion of this text in the context of the tradition of the Islamic Malay sultanate, see Burhanuddin 2007: 30-31.

18. The seven grades are *aḥadīyah* (the grade of emptiness), *waḥdah* (the stage of first individuation), *waḥidiyah* (the second grade of individuation where God manifests His Name), *‘ālam arwāḥ* (the world of spirit), *‘ālam mithāl* (the world of ideas or prototypes), *‘ālam ajsām* (the world of form), and *‘ālam insān kāmīl* (the world of Perfect Man).

19. Hurgonje 1906: 19; Riddell 2006: 38.

20. Azra 1994: 121.

21. Zamzam 1979: 7.

It is clear from the examples above that a number of works were written in certain contexts and that they became an important part of the social-intellectual history of the Nusantara people. For this reason, the study of these texts is, of course, very important.

In brief, *Ithāf al-dhakī* has its own context which makes it important, especially for the Islamic intellectual tradition in the Nusantara World, because it was written in response to, in the words of al-Kūrānī, the *Jamā'at al-Jāwīyīn* (Jāwī community),<sup>22</sup> and more specifically to shed light on debates and misunderstandings surrounding the *waḥdat al-wujūd* doctrine in Aceh.

### On the *Ithāf al-dhakī*

As hinted at in the title, the *Ithāf al-dhakī* is an Arabic commentary (*sharḥ*) on another work entitled *al-Tuḥfah al-mursalāh* written by Faḍl Allāh al-Hindī al-Burhānpūrī.<sup>23</sup> It is related to the teachings of the Seven Grades (*Martabat Tujuh*), which were very popular among the Muslim community in the Nusantara World. However, in fact, the *Ithāf al-dhakī* is more than just a commentary because its own introduction, which deals with al-Kūrānī's elucidation on the concept of Sufism and the Sufi experience, takes up two thirds of the text.

Even though it was initially written at the request of some *Jamā'at al-Jāwīyīn*, the exposition of the divine concepts in the *Ithāf al-dhakī* are more theoretical and of a very general nature. Al-Kūrānī does not seem to have had any knowledge, because he never touches upon it, of who was engaged in the study of, and what works had emerged in the Nusantara World at the time that touched upon the issues he discusses. For instance, he never mentions Ḥamzah al-Fanṣūrī, Shams al-Dīn al-Sumatrā'ī, Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī, or even 'Abd al-Ra'ūf ibn 'Alī al-Jāwī al-Fanṣūrī who allegedly pointed out the issue to him.

It is also because of its very general nature, that in a way the *Ithāf al-dhakī* became the answer to divine questions, or more specifically, the answer to questions about the concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, that captivated readers from other areas in the Muslim World,<sup>24</sup> and was quoted, for

22. Azra (1994: 196; 2004: 75), basing himself on another Arabic source uses the term *aṣḥāb al-Jāwīyīn* (the companions of *Jāwī*) to denote the Nusantara community in the Ḥaramayn. However, since the *Ithāf al-dhakī* is the main source for our discussion, I will use the expression *jamā'at al-Jāwīyīn* instead, as used by al-Kūrānī himself.

23. He was a disciple of Shaykh Wajḥ al-Dīn ibn Qāḍī Naṣr Allāh 'Alawī Hindī Ahmādabadī (910-998 A.H.), and the pupil of Shaykh Muḥammad ibn Kathīr al-Dīn Ḥusaynī, commonly named Muḥammad al-Ghauth, the author of *al-Jawāhir al-khamsah* (Loth 1877, I: 191-192).

24. See, for instance, Johns 1978: 481.



instance, in an influential Sufi text from West Africa entitled *Kitāb rimah ḥizb al-raḥīm* written by al-Ḥajj ‘Umar.<sup>25</sup> It is therefore not surprising that a rather large number of copies of the *Ithāf al-dhakī* have been found (there are thirty known manuscripts so far), scattered over various libraries around the world.<sup>26</sup>

The earliest date for the redaction of the *Ithāf al-dhakī* is found in two of the oldest copies, namely MS 820 in the collection of Fazil Ahmed Pasa, Köprülü Library, Istanbul,<sup>27</sup> and MS Arab 250 in the Library of Harvard University,<sup>28</sup> which mention that the *Ithāf al-dhakī* was written starting on Sunday, 30 Rabī‘ al-Awwal 1076/10 October 1665, and completed in early Jumādā al-Ākhir of the same year. It may be that this date refers not to the time of al-Kūrānī’s own writing but to the year the text was copied.

Whatever the case, we may safely assume that MS 820 and MS Arab 250 are the closest to the autograph, which may have been written some years earlier. Drewes was of the opinion that the *Ithāf al-dhakī* was written before 1660 because al-Kūrānī wrote the text at the request of his teacher, Aḥmad al-Qushāshī who died in 1071/1660.<sup>29</sup> However, as emphasised by Azra, Drewes failed to offer any evidence to substantiate his hypothesis.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Basheer M. Nafī, who claims that the *Ithāf al-dhakī* was written in 1072/1661,<sup>31</sup> does not mention his source as MS Al-Azhar 288, to which he refers, does not contain the year of writing but only the year when it was copied, namely 1302/1884.

### A Glimpse on Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī

Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī was an ‘*ālim* known to be reconciliatory and keen on reaching compromises, as he was inclined to choose the middle way between two opposite opinions. Not unlike his teacher, al-Qushāshī, al-Kūrānī focused on *sharī‘ah* as well as on Sufism so that, in his view, a Sufi should not let his mystical practices conflict with the *sharī‘ah* and other religious obligations. Al-Kūrānī’s character did not build up overnight but, to a large extent, was influenced both by his educational background and by the social intellectual context that surrounded him.<sup>32</sup>

25. Radtke 1995.

26. Fathurahman 2009: 47-58.

27. Seşen (*et. al.*) 1986, I: 401.

28. Harvard University Library. 15 October 2010  
<<http://pds.lib.harvard.edu/pds/view/10323898>>.

29. Drewes 1959: 283.

30. Azra 1994: 121.

31. Nafī 2002: 334.

32. See Johns 1978.

As may be seen from the addition to his name, al-Shahrazūrī, al-Kūrānī came from Shahrazur, a town in the Hawraman area, presently known as Iraqī Kurdistan at the border with Iran.<sup>33</sup> Arab biographers assign him a number of nicknames (*laqab*) such as Abū al-‘Irfān,<sup>34</sup> Burhān al-Dīn, Abū Ishāq, Abū Muḥammad, and Abū al-Waqt,<sup>35</sup> which are found in a number of copies of his work.<sup>36</sup>

Sources differ regarding the lifetime of al-Kūrānī, although most mention 1025/1616 as the year of his birth and 1101/1690 as that of his death.<sup>37</sup> Al-Murādī (1988, I, p. 6) gives a more precise date for al-Kūrānī’s death, stating that he died on Wednesday, in the afternoon after Aṣar prayers, on the 12<sup>th</sup> of Rabī‘ al-Thānī 1101/23 January 1690. However, al-Albānī (1996: 66) has claimed that al-Kūrānī died a few months later, on 28 Jumādā al-Ūlā 1101/9 March 1690.

It is clear that the young al-Kūrānī enjoyed wandering from place to place seeking Islamic knowledge. After having finished elementary education at his birthplace, including Arabic, theology (*kalām*), logic (*manṭiq*), and philosophy, he went to Bagdad during Turkish Ottoman times, the place any Kurdish ulama dreamed of going to study with religious figures there.

After spending two years to study with, among others, Muḥammad Sharīf al-Kūrānī in Bagdad, al-Kūrānī went to Damascus to study with ‘Abd al-Bāqī Taqī al-Dīn al-Ḥanbalī (d. 1070/1660) and Najm al-Dīn al-Ghazzī.<sup>38</sup> The teacher first mentioned was mufti in Damascus and a foremost Ḥanbalī scholar in the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century. It was in Damascus that al-Kūrānī specialized in Ḥanbalī *fiqh* texts, and in the works written by Ibn Taymīyah (1263-1328 CE) and one of his students, Ibn al-Qayyim (1292-1350 CE).<sup>39</sup> Al-Kūrānī also seems to have had spare time to study Islamic literature in various languages because besides Arabic (of course), he was also very versed in Persian and Turkish.<sup>40</sup>

In 1061/1650, al-Kūrānī found the opportunity to study with Abī al-‘Azā’im Sulṭān ibn Aḥmad al-Mazāḥī and Muḥammad ibn ‘alā’ al-Dīn al-

33. For a preliminary discussion on the sources of al-Kūrānī’s biography, including his own work entitled *al-Amam li iṭqāz al-himam*, see Azra 1994: 91.

34. see al-Sawwās 1986, II: 14.

35. See, for instance, the first part of the *Maṭla‘ al-jūd* MS 3765 in the Laleli collection, al-Süleymaniye Library, Istanbul.

36. al-Zarkalī 1969, I: 28; Brockelmann 1996, II: 505-506; al-Baghdādī 1951, I: 35-36; al-Murādī 1988, I: 6.

37. Al-Murādī, 1988, I, p. 3.

38. *Ibid.*

39. Al-Kūrānī, *al-Amam...*, MS 504, Dār al-Kutub Library, Cairo, f. 43.

40. Al-Zarkalī 1969, I: 35.

Bābilī in Cairo before he finally studied with various ulamas in Medina such as Abū al-Mawāhib Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī al-Shanāwī, Muḥammad Sharīf ibn Yūsuf al-Kūrānī, ‘Abd al-Karīm ibn Abī Bakr al-Ḥusaynī al-Kūrānī, and especially with Ṣafī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Qushāshī (d. 1660 CE).<sup>41</sup>

Al-Kūrānī established a special relationship with al-Qushāshī which went far beyond that between teacher and student. Apart from succeeding him as the leader of the Shaṭṭārīyah mystical brotherhood and studying a wide variety of Islamic knowledge, he also married al-Qushāshī's daughter; by so doing, their relationship was both familial and scholarly.<sup>42</sup> This reminds us of the relationship al-Qushāshī himself had with Aḥmad al-Qūnāwī who was his intellectual teacher, his *murshid* in the Shaṭṭārīyah brotherhood, and his father-in-law, all at the same time.<sup>43</sup>

Although he had acquired comprehensive knowledge from al-Qushāshī, al-Kūrānī enriched it by studying with a number of other ulamas in Medina, most specifically with Muḥammad al-Bābilī and ‘Isā al-Tha‘ālībī. Thus he became an ‘*ālim al-Murādī*’ likened to a ‘*jabalan min jibāl al-‘ilm baḥran min buḥūr al-‘irfān*’ (a mountain between numerous other mountains of knowledge, and a ship among many other barks of wisdom).

It is not surprising that al-Kūrānī's reputation in scholarship was already ‘extraordinary’ in his lifetime. His studies in ḥadīths, for instance, not only included the collections of the commonly recognized ḥadīths, but also the collections of ‘less important’ or commonly unrecognized ḥadīths, which sometimes escaped attention. The same holds for *fiqh*. Al-Kūrānī not only studied and mastered the Shāfi‘ī and Ḥanafī *fiqh* texts that were the main focus at the time among the Medina Muslim community, but also the Ḥanbalī and Mālikī *fiqh* texts. In theology, he was not only versed in al-Ash‘arī and al-Mātūrīdī's thoughts, but his studies also encompassed those of ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Maqdisī in his *Kitāb i'tiqād al-Shāfi‘ī*, and al-Bukhārī's views in his *Khalq af‘āl al-‘ibād*. Both were considered as ‘non mainstream’, as far as theological thought among Sunnī ulamas was concerned, because they did not always accord with al-Ash‘arī and al-Mātūrīdī's thoughts which were most influential at the time.<sup>44</sup>

This complicated scholarly background clearly shaped al-Kūrānī's character and made him a moderate, so that he could always empathise with ideas that differed from his own, and take the middle path between opposing views rather than clearly siding with any one of them. In his *Ithāf al-dhakī*, al-Kūrānī himself says that:

41. Al-Murādī 1988, I, p. 3.

42. Nafi 2002: 321.

43. Azra 1994: 88.

44. Al-Kūrānī, *al-Amam*..., ff. 10-12 and 16; see also Nafi 2002: 322.

والجمع مقدم على الترجيح مهما أمكن

(Combining [two different thoughts] is preferable over choosing either one of them, in as far as this is possible)

In this matter, al-Kūrānī quotes ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb’s words, who said:

وضع أمر أخيك على أحسنه حتى يجنك منه ما يقلبك ولا تظن بكلمة خرجت من مسلم  
شرا أو سوءا وأنت تجد لها في الخير محملا

“... and interpret your brother's stance according to the best perspective, until you find some proof that can help you change your mind; and do not regard the words of a Muslim as bad or wicked as long as you can find a good interpretation of it.” (terjemahan tidak jelas, perlu dibetulkan).

Al-Kūrānī’s stance, as a Sufi himself, towards Ibn Taymīyah is a prime example of his moderate and polite approach towards conflicting ideas. It is common knowledge that Ibn Taymīyah was the foremost Sunnī figure who was most diligent in his criticism against Sufi interpretation, understanding, and practices because he considered them to deviate from the pillars of the *sharī‘ah*, although he had studied Sufism rather in-depth. In one of his works, *al-‘Aqīdat al-wāsiṭīyah*, for instance, he strongly rejects the views of Sufi theologians and launches sharp criticism against the Jahmīyah and Mu‘tazilah whose theological ideas Sufi figures had adopted.

One of Ibn Taymīyah’s criticisms concerns the Sufi interpretation of Qur’ānic verses, which he thought far exceeds the inner meaning of the Qur’ān itself.<sup>45</sup> As sketched by al-Suyūṭī in *al-Itqān*, Ibn Taymīyah idea was that among the Sufis there were those who interpreted the Qur’ān in a sense that in reality could be right, but that the Qur’ān itself did not point to that kind of understanding.<sup>46</sup>

Considering this kind of criticism by Ibn Taymīyah, al-Kūrānī thought that as far as Ibn Taymīyah was only convinced that the interpretation of the Sufis did not accord with the inner meaning of the Qur’ān, this was acceptable and need not pose a problem because for al-Kūrānī, the Qur’ān was all-encompassing and perfect, and contained both an inner and an outer meaning. Each meaning that was the result of a particular model of interpretation, as long as it was supported by the rules of Arab grammar and

45. Ibn Taymīyah prefers to interpret the Qur’ān literally. For instance, in the case of the attributes of Allah, he held the principle to ‘describe God as He described Himself, both in the Qur’ān as through the ḥadīth of the Prophet’ (Laoust 2003, “Ibn Taymīyah”). He was, for instance, convinced that Allah, as mentioned in the Qur’ān, had hands, a face, eyes, and others, although he did not look like any other creature.

46. See al-Suyūṭī, 1354, chapter 78, for a discussion on this issue.

accorded with the law principles of the *sharī'ah*, was an inherent aspect of the Qur'ān and could therefore be justified (al-Kūrānī, *Ithāf al-dhakī*, f. 14r).

More than just being tolerant, at the end of his work entitled *Ifādat al-'allām*, al-Kūrānī even stated his earnest defense of Ibn Taymīyah's theological ideas and those of his star student, Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawzīyah. It was mainly directed at ulamas from Ash'arīyah circles who accused Ibn Taymīyah and his students of ascribing human characteristics to God. According to al-Kūrānī, Ibn Taymīyah merely wanted to describe God with the description He gave Himself, rejecting characteristics that God did not mention Himself while emphasising the difference between those characteristics and those of His creations".<sup>47</sup> Through this way of looking, al-Kūrānī tried hard to create a theological reconciliation between the adherents of Asha'riyah and the Hanbaliyah, especially in connection with the basic characteristics of the Qur'ān. Through these kinds of elucidations he hoped that the Sufi Ash'arī would be more willing to accept Ibn Taymīyah's theological views.

Once again, al-Kūrānī's tolerance towards, and his simultaneous defense of Ibn Taymīyah's thought cannot be viewed without considering his complex educational background. Although Ibn Taymīyah's works are never specifically mentioned in his intellectual biography, it is clear that al-Kūrānī was well acquainted with his views – that follow those of the Hanbalī School – when he was studying with 'Abd al-Bāqī al-Hanbalī.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, al-Kūrānī was very familiar with and had intimate knowledge of the ideas of one of Ibn Taymīyah's foremost students, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah (691-751/1292-1350).<sup>49</sup> Having knowledge of various often-conflicting schools and currents, al-Kūrānī was able to put himself in a proper position and to adopt a moderate and far from extreme attitude in expressing his views.

His affiliation with a number of mystical brotherhoods also played a role in forming his character as a Sufi who was on the one hand, able to defend the notion of Ibn 'Arabī's *waḥdat al-wujūd*, but on the other hand to emphatically emphasise the importance of adherence to the principles of the *sharī'ah* by often quoting the views of Sunnī ulamas such as al-Junayd al-Baghdādī (d. 298/911) or Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ṭūsī al-Ghazālī (450-505/1058-1111).

The Naqshbandīyah was one of the brotherhoods that influenced al-Kūrānī's intellectual tendencies, and al-Kūrānī was one of its leaders next to being leader of the Shaṭṭārīyah brotherhood. Al-Kūrānī must have known well how Aḥmad al-Sirhindī (1564-1624), an innovative 'ālim from India

47. Al-Kūrānī, *Ifādat al-'allām*, f. 62.

48. Nafi 2002: 324.

49. *Ibid.*: 330.

who was also a Naqshbandīyah leader, once severely criticised Ibn ‘Arabī’s *waḥdat al-wujūd* (ontological monism) which he considered pantheistic. He proposed to replace it with the *waḥdat al-shuhūd* (phenomenological monism) which he considered more in line with *sharī‘ah* principles.<sup>50</sup> Although there were already other scholars in the seventeenth century who rejected any relation between Sufi teachings and the *waḥdat al-wujūd* doctrine, al-Sirhindī was the earliest innovator and most outspoken in his criticism of the formulation of the mystical-philosophical doctrine of conservative Sufis and offered an alternative doctrine of his own.

As reported by al-Ḥamawī – al-Kūrānī’s own student who came to Medina in 1083/1672 – there were fierce debates about al-Sirhindī’s teachings among the ulamas in the Ḥaramayn which had resulted in two contesting factions. On one side there were al-Sirhindī’s followers and a group of Naqshbandīyah ulamas who actively disseminated his thought, while on the other side were those who equally aggressively wrote books against them. Muḥammad al-Barzanjī (1040-1103/1630/1691), for instance, was a Kurdish scholar and a prime student of al-Qushāshī, and wrote the *Qaḍḥ al-zind fī radd jahālāt ahl Sirhind* attacking al-Sirhindī’s thought.<sup>51</sup>

Being an adherent of the Naqshbandīyah brotherhood, al-Kūrānī did not oppose al-Sirhindī’s ideas about the need for conformity between Sufi teachings and *sharī‘ah* principles. Later, this teaching became the essence of al-Kūrānī’s thought as reflected in his works, including the *Ithāf al-dhakī*. The difference was that al-Kūrānī did not think that the *waḥdat al-wujūd* doctrine was pantheistic or in violation of the *sharī‘ah*. Rather than accepting al-Sirhindī’s ‘offer’ to replace the doctrine with the *waḥdat al-shuhūd*, al-Kūrānī made a new reinterpretation of the *waḥdat al-wujūd* so that it would no longer be understood as opposing the *sharī‘ah*.

Indeed, he lived between two worlds: one was a world where mystical-philosophical doctrines like the *waḥdat al-wujūd* together with the Ash‘arīyah theology strongly influenced the way of thinking of the ulamas, while in the other there were reform movements to propose new formulations that wanted to step out of these two established traditions. While al-Sirhindī and a number of other ulamas before al-Kūrānī used the ‘vehicle’ of reformation to attack the *waḥdat al-wujūd* ideology and the Ash‘arīyah theology, al-Kūrānī positioned himself between these two inclinations that already at the time had started to become extreme and accused each other of deviance.<sup>52</sup>

50. See Muztar 1979: 166-167. Regarding al-Sirhindī and his teachings, see, among others, Ahmad 1969, Friedman 1971, Ansari 1986.

51. Al-Baghdādī 1951, II: 302-303 lists 62 works by al-Barzanjī, including the *Qaḍḥ al-zind*.

52. Nafi 2002: 329.



In al-Kūrānī's eyes, an innovation the ultimate objective of which is to comprehensively destroy Sufi ideology and Ash'ariyah theology is a futile endeavour that leads to nothing. Therefore, he preferred to reconstruct and reinterpret both in such a way that both would be more in line with *sharī'ah* principles.

Al-Kūrānī was evidently acutely aware of his position among Ḥaramayn scholars as a Sufi teacher and leading intellectual with students from various backgrounds behind him so that he tried to look after all of them. He also did not seem to want to repeat, or to try to find a solution, to the harsh animosity he had witnessed between al-Sirhindī and his own colleagues among the Ḥaramayn ulamas, such as Muḥammad al-Barzanjī.

Fortunately, al-Kūrānī was very authoritative in the field of ḥadīth and not just because of his pedigree and the chain of his knowledge that connected him with leading *muḥaddiths* whose scholarly credibility was unquestionable, but also because he truly mastered their complicated ins and outs. Therefore his knowledge of the second most important Islamic source was so extensive that he could use them to read and reinterpret various Sufi and theological subjects.

Then, not surprisingly, many students of al-Kūrānī found it convenient to ask religious matters to him. We may see, for instance, that some of al-Kūrānī's works are explicitly written to answer questions asked by his colleagues and students on various religious issues. Among them are *Nizām al-zabarjud fī al-arba'īn al-musalsala*, written as a response to religious issues raised by Saiyid Yāsīn ibn a-Saiyid A. al-Ḥusaynī al-Khaṭīb al-Jazarī (Brockelmann 1996, II, 505), *Jawāb al-'atīd li-mas'alat awwal wājib wa-mas'alat al-taqālīd*, *al-Jawāb al-kāfī 'an mas'alat ihāṭat 'ilm al-makhlūq bi-al-gayr al-mutanāhī*, *al-Jawāb al-mashkūr 'an al-su'āl al-manzūr*, *Kashf al-mastūr fī jawāb as'ilat 'Abd al-Shakūr*, *al-Jawābāt al-gharāwīyah 'an al-masā'il al-Jāwīyah al-jahrīyah*, and *Ithāf al-dhakī*. The last two works mentioned clearly indicate that the questions posed to al-Kūrānī came from his students from the Nusantara World (*jamā'at al-jāwīyīn*).

Therefore, the transformation of al-Kūrānī's stance, which was not radical but courteous and reconciliatory, combined with his argumentative approach to various main issues in theological and Sufi thoughts and his tendency to reveal his ideas by basing them on traditional scholarly norms, in its turn left a strong mark on the scholarly tendencies of many of his students, among them 'Abd al-Ra'ūf ibn 'Alī al-Jāwī al-Fanṣūrī in Aceh. In several of his works, such as the *Tanbīh al-māshī*, *Kifāyat al-muḥtājīn*, and *Daqā'iq al-ḥurūf*, 'Abd al-Ra'ūf indeed truly continued al-Kūrānī's intellectual tradition as the defender of the *waḥdat al wujūd* teaching by consistently defending the Ash'ariyah theology and being consistent in *sharī'ah* principles.<sup>53</sup>

53. Fathurahman 2008.

It is interesting to notice that later the intellectual thought of al-Kūrānī influenced other scholars who came to the Ḥaramayn and interacted with his students. Quṭb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥīm, popularly known as Shāh Walī Allāh (1703-1762), a prominent Indian scholar, is a good example.<sup>54</sup> In India in particular, Shāh Walī Allāh is celebrated as a scholar who attempted to bring about reconciliation between the various schools of law and theology, and to carry out a reconciliatory approach regarding the so-called metaphysical doctrines of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, typically represented by Ibn ‘Arabī, and *waḥdat al-shuhūd*, a critical response to the latter by Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī.<sup>55</sup>

Shāh Walī Allāh could be regarded as a ‘grand student’ of al-Kūrānī, who inherited his intellectual attitude, since among the prominent scholars who influenced him most, was Shaykh Abū Ṭāhir al-Kurdī al-Madanī (d. 1145/1733), a disciple and son of al-Kūrānī, whose intellectual genealogy can be traced back to Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawwānī (d. 1502).<sup>56</sup> It is not surprising that al-Kūrānī’s thought and approach to Islam were very close to those of Shāh Walī Allāh’s father, ‘Abd al-Raḥīm (1644-1718), who also belonged to the al-Dawwānī tradition through the influence of his elder brother, Shaykh Abū al-Riḍā, and his teacher, Mīr Zāhid Hiravī.<sup>57</sup>

Abū Ṭāhir even passed the Sufī *khirqa* he received from his father, al-Kūrānī, as a recognition of Shāh Walī Allāh’s appreciation for mysticism. Of their close relationship, Muztar explains that:

“This advanced stage of mutual affection between the teacher and the pupil seems to have originated from the fact that their fathers, Shaikh Ibrahim Kurdi, and Shaikh ‘Abdur Rahim respectively, had identical views on Shaikh Muhiy-al-Din Ibn-e-‘Arabi, the great exponent of ontological monism (*waḥdat-al-wujud*). Both of them interpreted the Qur’an in the light of the philosophy of Ibn-e-‘Arabi<sup>58</sup>...”

### **Al-Kūrānī’s Sufism Interpretation in the *Ithāf al-dhakī***

As a whole, the *Ithāf al-dhakī* may be considered as al-Kūrānī’s defense and his effort to reach a compromise with Ibn ‘Arabī’s main ideas in relation to the Islamic mystical-philosophical doctrines as mentioned above. Some parts of this work emphasize the specific Sufī views regarding the position of the Qur’ān, the ḥadīth of the Prophet, and Sufi theology.

54. For a discussion about his early life and intellectual journey to Hejaz and Ḥaramayn, see Muztar 1979: 36-62.

55. Al-Ghazali 2001: 5.

56. *Ibid.*: 30-31.

57. Ghazi 2002: 84.

58. Muztar 1979: 54.



The basic principle of al-Kūrānī's exposition is his acceptance of the general teachings that had been put forward by ulamas from the Sunnī tradition and by those of the so-called *salaf al-ṣāliḥ* (the pious ancestors).<sup>59</sup> He subsequently interpreted and augmented the scope of the intent of these teachings until they ran parallel with the doctrines in the Sufī tradition. The result of the amalgamation of these two traditions became the most important aspect of the discussion in the *Ithāf al-dhakī* and with this also an important part of al-Kūrānī's true nature as a conciliator, who wanted his ideas to be accepted by as many circles as possible, including those who opposed him.<sup>60</sup> On a certain level, the *Ithāf al-dhakī* also constitutes a rectification to, and an orthodox interpretation of heterodox, pantheistic Sufī understandings considered to circumvent certain aspects of the *sharī'ah*, especially those caused by the misunderstanding of Sufī doctrines in the *al-Tuhfah al-mursalah*.

Looking closely at the very detailed, extensive, and complicated explanation it offers, the *Ithāf al-dhakī* may be viewed as one of the most important commentaries of Ibn 'Arabī's philosophical Sufī teachings, especially in relation to the concept of the *waḥdat al-wujūd*, or, as al-Kūrānī prefers to call it, the *tawḥīd al-wujūd* (unifying Being). Al-Kūrānī also extensively discusses the Necessary Being (*al-wājib al-wujūd*) and the undelimited Being (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*) and he positions his discussion in the context of the ontological relationship between God and creatures.<sup>61</sup>

The *Ithāf al-dhakī* is indeed not the only work by al-Kūrānī that offers explanations of the philosophical ideas of Ibn 'Arabī, because he also deals with the same topic, be it with a different approach, in other works such as the *Matla' al-jūd bi-taḥqīq al-tanzīh fī waḥdat al-wujūd* and *Tanbīh al-'uqūl 'alā tanzīh al-ṣūfīyah 'an i'tiqād al-tajsīm wa-al-'aynīyat wa-al-ittiḥād wa-al-ḥulūl*. It is not the longest work he wrote as well, for the *Qaṣd al-sabil ilā tawḥīd al-Ḥaq al-Wakīl* – a commentary of the *al-Manzūmat*, the work of his teacher, al-Qushāshī – is almost twice as long. However, *Ithāf al-dhakī* is the only al-Kūrānī's work that could be found so far among those he wrote for the benefit of *Jāwī* audiences.

One outstanding methodology al-Kūrānī uses to present his ideas is by relying on the evidence found in the Qur'ān through literal interpretations and by emphasising the importance of the hidden meaning and the context of

59. *Ithāf al-dhakī* MS 288 of the Al-Azhar Library collection, and its copy, MS 9276 in the Dār al-Kutub Library, Cairo, note that what is meant by '*salaf al-ṣāliḥ*' are those who lived in the early third century Hijrī/ninth century CE.

60. Johns 1978: 481.

61. See for instance the text of *Ithāf al-dhakī* MS 820 of Fazil Ahmet Pasa collection, p. 59r-65v.

the verses he quotes. Apart from that, al-Kūrānī also put forward very convincing argumentations in the field of ḥadīth because he based his analyses on the tradition of its narration as well. In various parts, al-Kūrānī even shows that he truly masters Arabic grammar by offering linguistic analyses of the sentences he uses. We also find this kind of methodology in some of his other works such as the *Qaṣd al-sabīl* and *Maṭla‘ al-jūd*.

Through the *Ithāf al-dhakī* we may get a picture of al-Kūrānī as someone who mastered various Islamic sciences, and who does not only follow the perspective of the School (*madhhab*) he adheres to, but also other perspectives that conflict with his own. Even when he wants to oppose a point of view, he always first sets out these views by referring to both the persons and their works that have a connection with it. Only after that will he set forth his own opinions which he bases on proof from the Qur’ān, ḥadīth, linguistic analysis and other sources.

Unfortunately, al-Kūrānī’s sources cannot always be easily traced because he often incorporated them directly into his exposition so that an understanding of the context of the sentence he discusses in the *Ithāf al-dhakī* needs to be considered carefully. This way of quotation or paraphrase was apparently still customary in the past, because other important works, such as the *al-Durrah al-fākhirah* written by Nūr al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Rahmān ibn Aḥmad al-Jāmī’ (817-898/1414-1492), also use this way of exposition.<sup>62</sup>

The most important references al-Kūrānī uses in the *Ithāf al-dhakī* – and in fact also in his other Sufi works – are of course the thought of Muḥyī al-Dīn Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn al-‘Arabī al-Ḥātimī al-Ṭā’ī (560-638/1165-1240), more commonly known as Ibn al-‘Arabī, especially in his *al-Futūḥāt al-makkīyah* although al-Kūrānī also uses Ibn ‘Arabī’s other works such as the *Mawāqī‘ al-nujūm wa-maṭālī‘ ahillat al-asrār wa-al-‘ulūm* and *al-Ism al-bārī*.

This should not be surprising because from the outset, al-Kūrānī was apparently already aware of his position as interpreter and advocate of the philosophical Sufi ideas of the *‘al-Shaykh al-Akbar’*.<sup>63</sup> Looking at the parts of the *al-Futūḥāt al-makkīyah* he quotes, for instance, it appears clearly that al-Kūrānī wants to show, by adding proofs, that Ibn ‘Arabī’s mystical-philosophical ideas indeed do conform to the Islamic orthodox notions that are based on the Qur’ān and the ḥadīth of the Prophet. To invigorate his explanation, al-Kūrānī also quotes interpretations made by Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ishāq al-Qūnawī (w. 673/1274), one of Ibn ‘Arabī’s own

62. Heer 1979: 8.

63. See Knysh 1995. For a very valuable study of the perception of Ibn ‘Arabī’s personality and teaching by Muslim scholars throughout the four centuries following his death, see Knysh 1999.

students through his work *I'jāz al-bayān fī ta'wīl umm al-Qur'ān*<sup>64</sup> and the *al-Nafahāt al-ilahiyāt*.

Before offering his ideas on the *waḥdat al-wujūd*, *al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*, and *al-wājib al-wujūd* concepts, al-Kūrānī first quotes explanations from a variety of sources that are related to the understanding of the knowledge of God (*'ilm al-ma'rifah*) or knowledge of Reality (*'ilm al-haqā'iq*) itself such as 'Alā' al-Dīn 'Alī ibn Aḥmad al-Mahā'imī's *Mashra' al-khuṣūṣ ilā ma'ānī al-nuṣūṣ* and the *Miṣbāḥ al-uns bayn al-ma'qūl wa-al-mashhūd fī sharḥ miṣṭāḥ ghayb al-jam' wa-al-wujūd* written by Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ḥamzah al-Fanārī, although al-Kūrānī consistently quotes Ibn al-'Arabī as his main source.

The concept of *'ilm al-ma'rifah* indeed forms the main framework for all of al-Kūrānī's discussions in the *Ithāf al-dhakī* so that the topic receives special attention at the outset of his exposition. Apart from the sources mentioned above, he also explains the so-called '*al-tawḥīd al-ḥaqīqī*' (the ultimate unity)' by referring to the views of Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Diḡānī in his *Risālah khalq al-a'māl*, and the *Najāt al-ḥā'irīn fī sharḥ Manāzil al-sā'irīn*<sup>65</sup> written by Kamāl al-Dīn 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Ka'shānī (d. 730/1329), and a number of narratives in the *al-Riyāḍ al-naḍīrah fī manāqib al-'ashrah* by al-Muḥibb al-Ṭabarī that describes the attitudes of the close companions of the Prophet in connection with the issue of theology.

However, among the sources that al-Kūrānī evidently considered most important in connection with the topic of theology is the *al-Ibānah fī uṣūl al-diyānah*, the last and most often cited work written by Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Ismā'īl al-Ash'arī (260-324/873-935). Al-Ash'arī's theological views as laid down in the *al-Ibānah* formed an important starting point for al-Kūrānī in writing his own Sufi doctrines so that they accorded with the principles of orthodox Islam.

In setting out his evidence from the Qur'ān and the ḥadīth of the Prophet in order to support his thought, al-Kūrānī strongly emphasises the importance of explicit and implicit meanings of the Qur'ānic texts and the ḥadīth that he quotes. It is thus not surprising that in large parts of his discussion he tries to convince his readers that the text of the Qur'ān and the ḥadīth always carry two meanings: the explicit and implicit ones, and that interpreting the revelations of Allah and His Prophet by using the implicit and 'uncommon' meaning does not mean that the explicit understanding of

64. This work has also been published under the title *al-Taḥf al-ṣūfī li-al-qur'ān*, see 'Aṭā', 1969.

65. The text of *Manāzil al-sā'irīn* itself was written by Abū Ismā'īl 'Abd Allāh ibn Muḥammad al-Anṣārī al-Harawī (w. 481/1088) (Loth 1877, II: 99-100).

the text is changed but only that the implicit meaning is exposed as far as the text itself allows and indicates this and as long as it does not deviate from the rules of the language.

In his long discussion of the topics that underlie his subsequent discussions, al-Kūrānī bases his views on a number of trusted sources, including the *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* and the *Mishkāṭ al-anwār* by Ḥujjat al-Islām al-Ghazālī, *'Awārif al-ma'ārif* by Shihāb al-Dīn Abū Ḥafṣ 'Umar al-Suhrawardī (539-632/1145-1234), *Miṣbāḥ al-uns bayn al-ma'qūl wa-al-mashhūd* by Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ḥamzah al-Fanārī (d. 834/1430), which is an explanation of the *Miftāḥ ghayb al-jam' wa-al-wujūd* written by al-Qūnawī, *Tafsīr al-kashshāf* by Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī (467-538/1075-1144), and the *Tafsīr al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-qur'ān* by Abū al-Faḍl 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr ibn Muḥammad Jalāl al-Dīn al-Khuḍayrī al-Suyūfī (849-911/1445-1505).

Al-Kūrānī had evidently truly 'fallen in love' with al-Suyūfī's ways of interpreting the Qur'ānic verses. This is not too surprising because both had a very strong foundation in ḥadīth scholarship so that they shared the same attitude, namely always seeking support for their ideas in the tradition of the Prophet, and both loved Sufism so that they were able to uncover the hidden meaning of the Qur'ān in a Sufi perspective. As we know, al-Suyūfī was not only a *mufasssīr*, *muḥaddith*, historian, and biographer, but also a Sufi teacher affiliated with the Shādhilīyah brotherhood.<sup>66</sup>

This does not mean, of course, that al-Kūrānī ignored other interpretations as he also often refers to other works such as the *Anwār al-tanzīl wa asrār al-ta'wīl* written by 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Alī Abū al-Khayr Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Bayḍāwī (716/1316), the compilation of which was inspired by the *Tafsīr al-Kashshāf* mentioned above.<sup>67</sup>

It is interesting to notice that in his Sufi thought, al-Kūrānī also quotes the *Tafsīr al-ḥaqā'iq* by Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (330-412/941-1021), who was considered by al-Dhahabī as being less reliable (*ghayr thiqaḥ*) and his interpretations were even considered to deviate because they legitimised the philosophical views of the Sufis.<sup>68</sup> However, al-Kūrānī looked for Quranic explanations that could support his interpretation of the Sufi philosophical doctrines so that his interpretations were acceptable to a wider Muslim public.

As mentioned above, linguistic analysis was one of the argumentation methods al-Kūrānī used in his *Ithāf al-dhakī* so that his exploration of the hidden meaning of a text would not look perfunctory. He did this, for

66. Geoffroy, in EI, 2003: 'al-Suyūfī'.

67. J. Robson, in EI, 2003, "al-Bayḍāwī".

68. al-Dhahabī 1413/1993, vol. 17: 247, and al-Dhahabī 1999, vol. 6: 118.

instance, when he offered his defense of the interpretation by some Sufis of the following ḥadīth of the Prophet: “*al-Iḥsān an ta‘buda Allāh ka-annaka tarāhu fa-in-lam takun tarāhu fa-innahu yarāka*” (*Iḥsān* is to adore Allah as though thou didst see Him, and thou dost not see Him he nonetheless seeth thee). Various Sufis al-Kūrānī agreed with considered this ḥadīth as an indication of the possibility for man to see God because they read and understood “is” to mean ‘*fa-in lam takun*’ (if you are not something), that is, if you are nothing, you are *fanā*<sup>69</sup> from yourself so that it is as if you are not there, and thus you are ‘*tarahu*’ (at that moment you see Him).

Al-Kūrānī used linguistic evidence to demonstrate that Arab grammar supports this kind of reading so that by itself it cancels al-Ḥāfiẓ Ibn Ḥajar’s contrary view in his work, *Fath al-bārī*, which al-Kūrānī extensively quoted before. Naturally, al-Kūrānī not only based his views on the possibility that man might see God through linguistic analysis only, because in the following parts he also refers to various other sources like the *Muntahā al-madārik fī sharḥ tā‘iyat ibn al-Fāriḍ* by Sa‘d al-Dīn al-Fargānī and the *Sharḥ al-mawāqif* written by al-Sayyid al-Sharīf ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1474), which are explanations of the *al-Mawāqif fī ‘ilm al-kalām* written by ‘Aḍud al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Rukn al-Dīn ibn ‘Abd al-Ghaffār al-Bakrī al-Shabānkārī al-Ījī (d. 756/1355). The latter work is used to this day as a source to teach Islamic theology at the Al-Azhar University in Cairo.

### Closing remarks

Taking his Sufi thought into account, especially those related to his interpretation of the *waḥdat al-wujūd* doctrine as evidenced from his *Ithāf al-dhakī*, al-Kūrānī may clearly be considered as an interpreter and advocate of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s philosophical Sufi thought.

Unfortunately, in general, modern scholars of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s thought only mention ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī (w. 736/1335), ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. 832/1428), or ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jāmī (d. 898/1492), among his interpreters and never mention al-Kūrānī. The reason is maybe the fact that his thought is not well known. So far, only three of his almost one hundred works have been published and they do not include the *Ithāf al-dhakī*, which actually contains a long and in-depth discussion of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s mystical-philosophical doctrines.

I hope therefore that this article will represent a preliminary contribution to an introduction of al-Kūrānī’s thoughts, especially those related to the *waḥdat al-wujūd*, *al-wājib al-wujūd* and *al-wujūd al-muṭlaq* concepts that

69. *fanā*’ is a station of annihilation in God (see Nasr 1972: 66).

are often related to Ibn al-‘Arabī’s teachings. Regarding the Islamic intellectual tradition in the Nusantara World in the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century, the *Ithāf al-dhakī* may be considered as one of the most important sources because it forms one, if not the only, Arabic source that mentions the misunderstandings among the Muslim community in this region in connection with the *waḥdat al wujūd*.

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